

TWO-COMPARTMENT CONTAINER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to the packaging arts. More particularly, the present invention relates to the containers, often made of foamed or solid (unfoamed) polystyrene sheet material, in which food, especially that intended to be purchased at a restaurant or similar establishment and consumed off-premises, is packaged.

2. Description of the Prior Art

10 The prior art is replete with examples of containers of the subject type. For example, U.S. Patent No. 4,915,251 to Payne discloses a thermoformed plastic carton constructed from two half sections which are integrally connected along one side by a hingable joint to allow the half sections to be folded upon each other. The carton also includes resiliently deflectable latches extending up from an edge of one carton half which
15 each mate with and become lodged in a receptacle in the other carton half section when the carton half sections are folded one upon another.

 One of the two half sections, the base, is formed with one or more compartments for receiving food. As illustrated in the patent, the base has three such compartments. The lid, that is, the other of the two half sections, has no compartments.
20 Clearly, when the carton is closed, the three compartments, each possibly having a different food item, are not isolated from one another. As a consequence, a warm item in

one of the compartments will lose heat to the entire interior of the closed carton. This may not present a problem unless an item in another compartment, such as a salad, is better when kept cold.

In view of the above, there has been a need for a multi-compartment
5 container having compartments which are isolated from one another when the container is closed. That need is met by the present invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, the present invention is a two-compartment container having a
10 lid portion and a base portion. The lid portion is hingedly connected to the base portion by a hinge, and is thereby openable and closable relative to the base portion in the manner of a clamshell.

The base portion has a base partition extending across the base portion in a direction substantially transverse to the hinge and dividing the base portion into a first
15 compartment and a second compartment. The base portion also has a locking flap opposite to the hinge.

The lid portion has a lid partition extending across the lid portion in a direction substantially transverse to the hinge. The lid partition is aligned with the base partition so as to abut against the base partition when the two-compartment container is
20 closed. The lid partition is separated from a face of the lid portion opposite to the hinge by a gap. When the lid portion is closed onto the base portion, the locking flap on the base

portion fits into the gap in the lid portion. The locking flap and the face of the lid portion together have cooperative means for maintaining the two-compartment container in a closed condition.

When the lid portion is closed onto the base portion, the lid partition and the
5 base partition, which align with one another as stated above, abut against one another and effectively isolate the first compartment from the second compartment. To complete this isolation, the locking flap includes a wedge which fits into the gap in the lid portion, and, above the wedge, an arcuate portion which presses into the top of the gap, the wedge and the arcuate portion together closing the gap when the lid portion is closed and locked onto
10 the base portion to prevent any communication between the first compartment and the second compartment.

The present invention will now be described in more complete detail with frequent reference being made to the several drawing figures identified below.

15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the two-compartment container of the present invention in a partially opened condition;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the container in a closed condition;

Figure 3 is a plan view of the top of the closed container shown in Figure 2;

20 Figure 4 is a cross-sectional view taken as indicated in Figure 3;

Figure 5 is a cross-sectional view taken as indicated in Figure 3;

Figure 6 is a plan view of the inside of a fully opened container; and

Figure 7 is a perspective view of the container supporting two additional containers.

5 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Turning now to consider these figures in greater detail, Figure 1 is a perspective view of a two-compartment container 10 of the present invention in a partially opened condition. The container 10 comprises a lid portion 12 and a base portion 14, the two portions 12, 14 being hingedly connected to one another at hinge 16 and being
10 openable and closable in the manner of a clamshell. The base portion 14 has a locking flap 18 opposite to the hinge 16. The locking flap 18 includes nubs 20 which enable the container 10 to maintain a closed condition by protruding through holes 22 in the face 24 of the lid portion 12 when the lid portion 12 is closed down onto the base portion 14. Locking flap 18 is also hingedly connected to the base portion 14 so that it may be pushed
15 inside the lid portion 12, when the latter is closed down onto the base portion 14, to ensure that the nubs 20 engage with their respective holes 22 to maintain the container 10 in a closed condition. When in that condition, the container 10 may be opened by pressing in on the nubs 20 from the outside of the container 10 to release them from the holes 22 and to allow the lid portion 12 to pop open. Alternatively, the container 10 may be opened
20 with one hand by inserting a finger between face 24 of the lid portion 12 and the wedge 46

of the locking flap 18, releasing the nubs 20 from the holes 22 and allowing the lid portion 12 to pop open.

The lid portion 12 has a partition 26 which extends thereacross from the hinge 16 to a point separated from the face 24 leaving a gap 28, so that the locking flap 18
5 may fit between face 24 and partition 26 when the container 10 is closed.

In a similar manner, the base portion 14 has a partition 30 which extends completely thereacross forming two compartments 29, 31 therein. Partitions 26, 30 are aligned with one another in order to enable two separate compartments 29, 31 to be isolated from one another when the lid portion 12 is closed down onto the base portion 14,
10 the gap 28 being closed in a manner to be described below. Nubs 20 and holes 22 are positioned so that lid portion 12 is under tension toward base portion 14 when container 10 is closed, thereby pressing partitions 26, 30 together to enable compartments 29, 31 to be isolated from one another.

The bottom of the compartments 29, 31 in the base portion 14 may have a
15 plurality of channels 32 to collect liquid which may drain or seep from food placed therein on either side of partition 30.

Except for the area of the hinge 16 and the locking flap 18, the base portion 14 has a stepped edge 34. In like manner, the lid portion 12 has a correspondingly stepped edge 36, so that stepped edge 36 fits into stepped edge 34 when the lid portion 12 is closed
20 down onto the base portion 14 to seal the interior of the container 10 from the outside. The stepped edges 34, 36 need not be shaped exactly as shown – those of ordinary skill in the

art will recognize that many corresponding and interlocking or intermeshing shapes may be used in the practice of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the two-compartment container 10 in a closed condition. The lid portion 12 includes a top surface divided into a first region 38 and a second region 40, these covering the two compartments 29, 31 formed by partition 30 within the bottom portion 14 of the container 10. As noted above, partition 26 of lid portion 12 does not extend completely to the face 24 of the lid portion 12, providing a gap 28 into which the locking flap 18 fits when the container 10 is closed. The gap 28 is evidenced by the bridge 42 connecting the first and second regions 38, 40.

The first region 38 of the top surface of the lid portion 12 has two vents 44, formed by perforations, in the form of flaps. The vents 44 are provided to enable heat and steam to escape from hot food disposed in compartment 29 below, and to keep them from entering compartment 31. Vents 44 have hinges 43 and may be kept closed or opened to any desired degree. Further, vents 44 are in recessed areas 45 which are below the plane of the first region 38 of the top surface of the lid portion 12, for a reason to be given below.

Figure 3 is a plan view of the top surface of the closed container 10, and Figures 4 and 5 are cross-sectional views taken as indicated in Figure 3. Turning first to Figure 4, a cross section taken longitudinally along the partition 26 separating the first and second regions 38, 40 and through the bridge 42 separating them, locking flap 18 includes a wedge 46, which is also visible in Figure 1. Wedge 46 seals the two compartments 29, 31 formed by partition 30 within the container 10 from one another by closing gap 28

between partition 26 and face 24 of lid portion 12. In particular, wedge 46 has an inner surface 48 which abuts the end surface 49 of partition 26 to close off the space which would otherwise allow communication between the two compartments 29, 31. It should be noted that the arcuate portion 50 above the wedge 46 deforms the inside surface 51 of bridge 42, when the container 10 is closed, to ensure that compartment 29 is isolated from compartment 31. It should be noted in Figure 4 that the inner surface 48 and arcuate portion 50 of wedge 46 are thicker than end surface 49 of lid partition 26 and inside surface 51 of bridge 42 in order that the wedge 46 be readily insertable into gap 28 against resilient end surface 49 and arcuate portion 50 may readily deform inside surface 51 of bridge 42. Moreover, the locking flap 18, being itself as thick as wedge 46 and substantially as high as the inside of the face 24 of the lid portion 12, stabilizes and supports the lid portion 12 when the container 10 is closed.

Turning now to Figure 5, a cross section taken across the container 10 and transversely through partition 26 as shown in Figure 3, partitions 26, 30 meet and abut one another when lid portion 12 is closed onto base portion 14 to separate two compartments 29, 31 from one another. In addition, the first and second regions 38, 40 of the top surface of the lid portion 12 have raised areas 56, 58. Similarly, the base portion 14 has a bottom surface which includes first and second regions 60, 62. These latter regions 60, 62 have indented areas 64, 66 of the same size as the respective raised areas 56, 58. This inhibits the sliding of containers 10 upon one another when they are stacked.

Moreover, still referring to Figure 5, the indented area 64 of first region 60 of bottom surface of base portion 14 has two channels 69, one in the rear visible in Figure 5, and the other visible in Figures 1 and 2, to permit heat and steam to escape from vents 44 when containers 10 are stacked upon one another. In such a situation, channels 69
5 communicate with recessed areas 45 of a container 10 stacked below to permit heat and steam to exit therefrom.

As noted above, base portion 14 has a stepped edge 34 and lid portion 12 has a stepped edge 36. As shown in Figure 5, stepped edges 34, 36 cooperate with one another to seal the perimeter of the closed two-compartment container 10, except in the
10 areas of the hinge 16 and locking flap 18. Stepped edge 36, having substantially the same shape as stepped edge 38, fits above and inside stepped edge 38 when the container 10 is closed to seal its perimeter. Channel 68 separates stepped edge 36 from the rest of the lid portion 12.

Figure 6 is a plan view of the inside of a fully opened two-compartment
15 container 10. Referring first to the lid portion 12, holes 22 are provided in the face 24 thereof for the nubs 20 provided on locking flap 18. Partition 26 is separated from face 24 by a gap 28 so that the wedge 46 may fit into the gap 28 when the container 10 is closed.

Referring to base portion 14, the bottom of each compartment 29, 31 has a plurality of channels 32 to collect liquid which drains or seeps from food placed therein on
20 either side of partition 30. A channel 70 runs around the perimeter of the bottom of each

compartment 29, 31, and is slightly lower than the plurality of channels 32 so that liquid accumulating in channels 32 may flow into channel 70.

Figure 7 is a perspective view of the two-compartment container 10 with additional containers 72, 74, sized to fit atop the first and second regions 38, 40 of the lid portion 12 of container 10, stacked thereon to illustrate a benefit of the container 10, namely, that its sturdy construction, reinforced by the locking flap 18, enables it to be used in the illustrated manner by customers who have purchased food items from vendors using the container 10. Preferably, the bottom of container 72 has an indented area like indented area 64 of first region 60 of bottom surface of base portion 14 of container 10 to enable container 72 to sit upon raised area 56 of first region 38 of the top surface of container 10 without sliding. Similarly, the bottom of container 74 preferably has an indented area like indented area 66 of second region 62 of bottom surface of base portion 14 of container 10 to enable container 74 to sit upon raised area 58 of second region 40 of the top surface of container 10 without sliding.

The two-compartment container 10 of the present invention is preferably formed by molding plastic sheet material, either foamed or solid (unfoamed), such as polystyrene sheet material.

Modifications to the above would be obvious to those of ordinary skill in the art, but would not bring the two-compartment container 10 so modified beyond the scope of the appended claims.